I'm simplifying this theory of story, but not by much. It should be obvious that such an elementary approach has even less practical value than Aristotle. But what's worse is that it promotes a view of story that is mechanical. The idea of an act break comes from the conventions of traditional theater, where we close the curtain to signal the end of an act. We don't need to do that in movies, novels, and short stories or even, for that matter, in many contemporary plays. In short, act breaks are external to the story. Three-act structure is a mechanical device superimposed on the story and has nothing to do with its internal logic—where the story should or should not go. A mechanical view of story, like three-act theory, inevitably leads to episodic storytelling. An episodic story is a collection of pieces, like parts stored in a box. Events in the story stand out as discrete elements and don't connect or build steadily from beginning to end. The result is a story that moves the audience sporadically, if at all. Another obstacle to mastering storytelling has to do with the writing process. Just as many writers have a mechanical view of what a story is, they use a mechanical process for creating one. This is especially true of screenwriters whose mistaken notions of what makes a script salable lead them to write a script that is neither popular nor good. Screenwriters typically come up with a story idea that is a slight variation on a movie they saw six months previously. Then they apply a genre, like "detective," "love," or "action," and fill in the characters and plot beats (story events) that go with that form. The result: a hopelessly generic, formulaic story devoid of originality. In this book, I want to show you a better way. My goal is to explain how a great story works, along with the techniques needed to create one, so that you will have the best chance of writing a great story of your own. Some would argue that it's impossible to teach someone how to tell a great story. THERE WAS NOTHING simple or straightforward or predictable about racist ideas, and thus their history. Frankly speaking, for generations of Americans, racist ideas have been their common sense. The simple logic of racist ideas has manipulated millions over the years, muffling the more complex antiracist reality again and again. And so, this history could not be made for readers in an easy-to-predict narrative of absurd racists clashing with reasonable antiracists. This history could not be made for readers in an easy-to-predict, two-sided Hollywood battle of obvious good versus obvious evil, with good triumphing in the end. From the beginning, it has been a three-sided battle, a battle of antiracist ideas being pitted against two kinds of racist ideas at the same time, with evil and good failing and triumphing in the end. Both segregationist and assimilationist ideas have been wrapped up in attractive arguments to seem good, and both have made sure to re-wrap antiracist ideas as evil. And in wrapping their ideas in goodness, segregationists and assimilationists have rarely confessed to their racist public policies and ideas. But why would they? Racists confessing to their crimes is not in their self-interest. It has been smarter and more exonerating to identify what they did and said as not racist. Criminals hardly ever acknowledge their crimes against humanity. And the shrewdest and most powerful anti-Black criminals have legalized their criminal activities, have managed to define their crimes of slave trading and enslaving and discriminating and killing outside of the criminal code. Likewise, the shrewdest and most powerful racist ideologues have managed to define their ideas outside of racism. Actually, assimilationists first used and defined and popularized the term “racism” during the 1940s. All the while, they refused to define their own assimilationist ideas of Black *behavioral* inferiority as racist. These assimilationists defined only segregationist ideas of Black *biological* inferiority as racist. And segregationists, too, have always resisted the label of “racist.” They have claimed instead that they were merely articulating God’s word, nature’s design, science’s plan, or plain old common sense. Jefferson died on the eve of the nineteenth century’s movement for emancipation and civil rights, a movement partially spearheaded by the pulsating editor of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), tour guide number three. Like his peers, Garrison’s most instrumentally passionate antislavery ideas drawing Americans to the cause of abolition and civil rights were usually not antiracist ideas. He popularized the assimilationist idea that slavery—or racial discrimination more broadly—had “imbruted” Black people; this oppression had made their cultures, psychologies, and behaviors inferior. It is one antiracist thing to say discriminators treated Black people like they were barbarians. It is yet another racist thing to say the discrimination actually transformed Black people into barbarians. The nation’s first great professionally trained Black scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), our fourth tour guide, initially adopted Garrison’s racist idea. But he also stood at the forefront of antiracist ideas, challenging Jim Crow’s rise in the late nineteenth century. Over the course of his long and storied career into the twentieth century, Du Bois’s double-consciousness of racist and antiracist ideas amazingly transfigured into a single consciousness of antiracism. In the process, however, his influence waned. In the 1950s and 1960s, racist arguments once again became the most influential ideas drawing Americans to the cause of civil rights. Later, civil rights and Black power advances—and the sensationalized “crises” of Black single-parent households, welfare “queens,” affirmative action, and violent rebels and criminals—all fed a ravishing racist backlash to the racial progress of the 1960s, including the judicial persecution of antiracist activists, most famously a young philosopher from the University of California at Los Angeles. Exonerated of all capital charges in 1972, Angela Davis (1943–present) spent the next four decades opposing the racial discriminators who learned to hide their intent, denouncing those who promoted end-of-racism fairytales while advocating bipartisan tough-on-crime policies and a prison-industrial complex that engineered the mass incarceration, beatings, and killings of Black people by law enforcement. She will be our fifth and final tour guide. RICHARD MATHER AND John Cotton inherited from the English thinkers of their generation the *old* racist ideas that African slavery was natural and normal and holy. These racist ideas were nearly two centuries old when Puritans used them in the 1630s to legalize and codify New England slavery—and Virginians had done the same in the 1620s. Back in 1415, Prince Henry and his brothers had convinced their father, King John of Portugal, to capture the principal Muslim trading depot in the western Mediterranean: Ceuta, on the northeastern tip of Morocco. These brothers were envious of Muslim riches, and they sought to eliminate the Islamic middleman so that they could find the southern source of gold and Black captives. After the battle, Moorish prisoners left Prince Henry spellbound as they detailed trans-Saharan trade routes down into the disintegrating Mali Empire. Since Muslims still controlled these desert routes, Prince Henry decided to “seek the lands by the way of the sea.” He sought out those African lands until his death in 1460, using his position as the Grand Master of Portugal’s wealthy Military Order of Christ (successor of the Knights Templar) to draw venture capital and loyal men for his African expeditions. In 1452, Prince Henry’s nephew, King Afonso V, commissioned Gomes Eanes de Zurara to write a biography of the life and slave-trading work of his “beloved uncle.” Zurara was a learned and obedient commander in Prince Henry’s Military Order of Christ. In recording and celebrating Prince Henry’s life, Zurara was also implicitly obscuring his Grand Master’s monetary decision to exclusively trade in African slaves. In 1453, Zurara finished the inaugural defense of African slave-trading, the first European book on Africans in the modern era. *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* begins the recorded history of anti-Black racist ideas. Zurara’s inaugural racist ideas, in other words, were a product of, not a producer of, Prince Henry’s racist policies concerning African slave-trading. The Portuguese made history as the first Europeans to sail along the Atlantic beyond the Western Sahara’s Cape Bojador in order to bring enslaved Africans back to Europe, as Zurara shared in his book. The six caravels, carrying 240 captives, arrived in Lagos, Portugal, on August 6, 1444. Prince Henry made the slave auction into a spectacle to show the Portuguese had joined the European league of serious slave-traders of African people. IN 1481, THE PORTUGUESE began building a large fort, São Jorge da Mina, known simply as Elmina, or “the mine,” as part of their plan to acquire Ghanaian gold. In due time, this European building, the first known to be erected south of the Sahara, became West Africa’s largest slave-trading post, the nucleus of Portugal’s operations in West Africa. A Genoese explorer barely three decades old may have witnessed the erection of Elmina Castle. Christopher Columbus, newly married to the daughter of a Genoese protégé of Prince Henry, desired to make his own story—but not in Africa. He looked instead to East Asia, the source of spices. After Portuguese royalty refused to sponsor his daring westward expedition, Queen Isabel of Spain, a great-niece of Prince Henry, consented. So 1492, after sixty-nine days at seas, Columbus’s three small ships touched the shores that Europeans did not know existed: first the glistening Bahamas, and the next.